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THE FREE NEGROES OF NORTH CAROLINA.

ACCORDING to the census of 1860, there were in the United States, in round numbers, 487,000 free negroes, of which the fifteen slave-holding States contained 251,000. Virginia stood first, with 58,000; North Carolina second, with 30,000; and in the seven States south of these, in which the most rigorous free-negro laws prevailed, there were a total of less than 40,000. In Virginia they formed 10.60 per cent. of the negro population, in North Carolina 8.42 per cent., and in the other seven States alluded to considerably less than two per cent.

There is hardly another instance in the range of history in which a class as comparatively insignificant in numbers and as timid and unaggressive in spirit has been the occasion of so much alarm and disquietude. The nearest parallel, though by no means a close one, is perhaps that of the Romanist of England in the latter part of the seventeenth century. However, to a candid mind there can be little doubt as to whether the panic of the English Whigs or that of the Southern slave-holders had the better foundation in reason and probability.

The laws of almost all the slave-holding States, not even excepting many that were early to abolish and oppose slavery, attest plainly enough what an ever-recurring, ever-deepening problem the free-negro question was from very early colonial times. In the frequent spasmodic reiteration of such laws we see the futile attempts either to lay or to largely control this spectre, which, springing into being at a word, waxed or waned as it was viewed through the medium of alarm or security. Still, the apprehension of which the free negroes were doubtless in nearly every case the innocent cause was natural, if not rea-

sonable. Not that they were formidable within themselves. Among a homogeneous people with solidarity of interest their very existence would have been ignored. But the slave-owners, like the upholders of all abnormal, arbitrary institutions, could not but be excessively suspicious and susceptible to panic. They dreaded the example and influence of free blacks dwelling among their enslaved brethren. They saw in the free negro an instigator and disseminator of insurrectionary doctrine which he perhaps never thought of, and gave him credit for a philanthropy and temerity which I am sure he never possessed.

The negro legislation of the South — indeed, of all the slave-holding States in proportion to the number of slaves and the consequent danger of insurrection — was harsh and grim enough, and it is not my desire to condone it. For the sake of fairness, I would only say, in passing, that a man whose house is stored with deadly explosives can hardly be blamed for placing very severe restrictions on fire. The crime and folly in placing and keeping them there over-shadows, if it does not excuse, the rest. Then slavery grew into an institution amid, and took the indelible impress of, an era of rigorous laws and cruel, unnatural punishments the world over. Scourgings and brandings, maimings and hangings, were as a rule inflicted for offenses now deemed trifling. Not only were criminals treated with incredible barbarity, but in the army, the navy, the school, the shop, the farm, the rod was seldom out of the hand of authority. Whitefield himself held it laudable to bring the negro under christianizing influences, even if the only road lay through slavery; to save heathen African souls at the expense of heathen African bodies. I would also

As Rood made his last shot, his strongly marked dark face was lighted with a keen sense of triumph. Although, according to strictest construction, the ball had not penetrated the centre, it was within a hair's breadth of it, and it was so unlikely that it would be surpassed that he tasted all the assured triumphs of victory before the battle was won.

With Mink's second shot arose the great dispute of the day. Like Rood's, it was not fairly in the bull's-eye, if the point of intersection might be so called, but it too lacked only a hair's breadth. Mink was willing enough for a new trial, but Rood, protesting, stood upon his rights. The judges consulted together apart, re-examined the boards, finally announced their incapacity to decide, and called in the "thirdsman."

Mink made no objection when the miller, as referee, came to look at the board. He, too, examined it closely, holding his big hat in his hand that it might cast no shadow. There was no perceptible difference in the value of the two shots. Mink hardly believed he had heard aright when the "thirdsman," with scarcely a moment's hesitation, declared there was no doubt about the matter. Rood's shot was the fairer. "I could draw a line twixt Mink's and the centre."

There was a yell of derision from the young fellows. Rood wore a provoking sneer. Mink stood staring.

"Look-a-hyar," he said roughly, "ye haffen-blind old owl! Ye can't tell the differ 'twixt them shots. It's a tie."

"Rood's air the closest, an' he gits the fust ch'ice o' beef!" said the old man, his white beard and mustache yawning with his toothless laugh. "Ai-yi! Mink, ye ain't so powerful minkish yit ez ter git the fust ch'ice o' beef."

"Ye'll hev the second ch'ice, Mink," said Price consolingly. He himself, the fourth best shot, had the fourth choice.

"I won't hev the second ch'ice!" exclaimed Mink. "It's nobody but

that thar weezened old critter ez 'lows I oughter. Fust he sent his gran'son, that thar slack-twisted 'Gustus Tom, ter git in my aim, — wisht I hed shot him! An' then, when I lets him be thurdsman, he air jes' so durned m'licious he don't even stop an' take a minit ter decide." Mink's heart was hot. He had been wounded in his most vulnerable susceptibility, his pride in his marksmanship.

"Look-a-hyar, Mink!" remonstrated Price, "ye ain't a-goin' off 'fore the beef's been butchered an' ye git the second ch'ice. Stop! Hold on!"

For Mink was about to mount.

"I don't want no beef," he said. "I hev been cheated 'mongst ye. I won the fust ch'ice, an' I won't put up with the second."

Price was nonplused for a moment; then he evolved a solution. "I'll sell it, Mink," he cried, "an' bring ye the money! An' don't ye furgit old Tobias Winkey," he added beguilingly.

"Who's old Tobias Winkey?" asked the old man, tartly.

Price laughed, sticking his hands 'in the pockets of his jeans trousers, and looked around, winking at the others with a jocosity enfeebled somewhat by his light sparse lashes. "Jes' a man ez hev got a job fur Mink," he said, enigmatically.

The old miller, baffled, and apprehending the mockery, laughed loud and aggressively, his white beard shaking, his bushy eyebrows overhanging his twinkling eyes.

"Hed n't ye better bust the mill down, Mink?" he said floutingly.

"I will, — see ef I don't!" Mink retorted, as he wheeled his horse.

Only idle wrath, an idle threat, void of even the vaguest intention. They all knew that at the time. But the significance of the scene was altered in the light of after events.

Mink's fate had mounted with him, and the mare carried double as he rode out of Piomingo Cove.

Charles Egbert Craddock.

add that it was the curse of the South to be chained by self-interest, — self-preservation they considered it, — that despotic controller of conduct, in an attitude towards slavery which the more disinterested world had outgrown and come to execrate.

To North Carolina belongs the sorry honor of being more lenient in the execution, if not in the spirit, of her laws governing this unhappy class than either Virginia or any of the other Southern States. Not only did she contain the largest proportion of whites, Texas alone excepted, and have therefore less to fear from a servile insurrection, but the negroes, instead of being collected on large plantations to themselves, were more generally divided up among smaller owners, in much closer contact with the whites, better understood, better treated, and consequently less disposed and less able to inflict harm. The number of slave-holders in North Carolina must have been comparatively very much larger than in the other States, as well as the number of slaves who were yearly hired out, usually passing into the families of small non-slave-holding farmers. This feeling of comparative safety had its influence in according both the slaves and free negroes more privileges on sufferance than was common in the large slave-holding States, though cruel statutes were not wanting, which were enforced and even exceeded in time of panic. Thus the free negroes possessed and exercised the elective franchise down to the constitutional convention of 1835, one hundred and twelve years after they had been formally disfranchised in Virginia. The same assembly also abolished their schools, although no penalty was ever imposed for the teaching by a white person of a negro, slave or free, to read or write. On this question, the attitude of the State was similar to that of the South in general. They also held real estate, which was prohibited in many other

States, and in some instances even became slave-owners themselves.

Although North Carolina modeled her free-negro legislation largely upon that of Virginia, she never entirely removed every restriction from manumission, as Virginia did from 1782 to 1805. Her attitude towards the foreign slave-trade about the same period was midway between that of Virginia and the States to the south. She neither prohibited it, like Virginia, nor encouraged it, like South Carolina and Georgia; but contented herself with imposing a tax on slave importation, and declaring it to be "of evil consequence and highly impolitic." Neither did the great movement for gradual emancipation in Virginia, about 1785, which under the leadership of Jefferson promised so much for a time, ever find much favor in this State.

Of the proprietary period in North Carolina, which came to an end in 1729, the colony being then barely seventy years old, there is only one statute extant restricting the manumission of slaves, or in any way relating to free negroes. This act marks the adoption of a policy subsequently modified and never rigidly enforced except in periods of alarm, but still to the last never wholly abandoned. This policy had its root in the generally accepted theory of the incompatibility of slaves and free blacks in the same community, and its end was the expulsion and exclusion of the latter. The act permitted the manumission of "good and orderly slaves" for "honest and faithful service," but the freedman must forthwith depart the province forever, under penalty of being sold to any one who would transport him out of the country. Had this law been strictly carried out, the tender of freedom to a creature as ignorant and as helpless as the slave perforce was would have been only mockery. For philanthropy at large had not yet taken note of him, if indeed it had of anything, with practical

effect. But the presence of nearly 5000 slaves in the State at the census of 1790 proves either that the act had fallen into disuse, or that their immigration from Virginia was tolerated, as it was later on in quiet times. Indeed, a considerable sprinkling of free negroes from this State served in the white regiments through the whole war of the Revolution. Several distinguished themselves. Local tradition preserves the memory of one by the name of Dibby, of noted bravery. He lived to a great age, and I have heard old men tell of his indignant protest at the polls when his ballot was refused at the next election after the disfranchising convention of 1835. Several large tracts of land in this vicinity were, during the latter part of the last century, the property of free negroes. One was a school-teacher and the neighborhood scribe. Several deeds in his handwriting are still preserved. The children of some of the best families in the neighborhood were numbered among his pupils. In fact, negroes, slave and free, were to some extent employed as teachers in several States, about that date. It is clear that either the bitter race prejudice of later times was then much less strong, or that the calling of teacher was less regarded. Doubtless both conditions were true. It is well known that the former was largely a thing of more recent growth; while neither the Old World nor some portions of the New seem then to have been very particular as to who had either mind or soul in charge.

After the Revolution, public opinion, and consequent legislation to the detriment of this class and the race in general, had received marked impulse from two different, though collateral, sources. The first of these was the aggressive emancipatory spirit of the North, which found national expression in the famous Quaker memorial to Congress in 1790; the other, the periodic alarms of anticipated insurrection of the slaves, — above

all, the Nat Turner insurrection, just over the Virginia border, in 1831.

Largely to resentment against the abolitionism of the North, and perhaps partly to a dread lest the newly liberated blacks of the North should gravitate towards the great mass of their race at the South, importing the dangerous doctrines of discontent and insurrection as they came, may be ascribed the first series of those laws passed in 1795. The first act, passed in 1795, compelled all free negroes entering the State to give bond in the sum of £200 for their good behavior, which was virtual exclusion, as it was doubtless intended to be. Manumitted slaves were permitted to remain on the same condition, which, with the aid of their emancipators, they sometimes succeeded in complying with. Failing to give the bond, and persisting in remaining in the State, both classes forfeited their freedom. An act passed in 1796 was still more stringent. According to this, no slave could be manumitted except for meritorious services, to be adjudged by the county court, the bond as to future behavior being still required. It will be noticed that, while the Northern States required a bond to guard against a manumitted slave falling on the public for support, the large slave-holding States took that means to prevent his tampering with the slaves; each section guarding against what it had most to fear. Closely following the above act came another, requiring six weeks' notice to be given preceding the term of the court which would be prayed to confirm the deed of manumission. With increased severity, it compelled the freedman to give bond in the sum of \$1000 to quit the State in ninety days after manumission. It further enacted that no deed of manumission should work to the detriment of an emancipator's creditors.

At this time North Carolina was less merciful to the free negro than Virginia. The former leaned, in theory at least,

rather to the policy of South Carolina and Georgia. But the period from 1799 to 1801 was a time of great excitement and apprehension of insurrection in Virginia. The result was that the act of 1782, facilitating the manumission of slaves, and taking all restrictions from their residence in that State, was repealed, and measures of unwonted severity were adopted. This alarm also extended to North Carolina, and actuated the only legislation of consequence on the subject for many years after that of 1795. The inference from the fact that no supplemental legislation of this nature followed for nearly thirty years is that either the working of the laws was satisfactory, — a quality never characteristic of such acts, — or that they were but the expression of a passing mood of the public mind, and that they lost their vitality when the mood changed. If the concurrent tradition of the country is to be believed, the latter was the case. Numbers of free negroes, especially in the northern tier of counties, agree in the statement that their forefathers came over from Virginia about sixty or eighty years ago, and that they were unhindered. Here they found cheaper lands, and laws, in their execution at least, more lenient, as well as a social attitude less hostile than in aristocratic Virginia. That this immigration was considerable is to be gathered from the fact that quite a third of the free-negro population of the State was to be found in the counties contiguous to Virginia. The presence of large numbers in some of the southern counties leads to the belief that there was also some immigration of this class from South Carolina, though in a much less degree. However, free negroes were to be found in every county in the State, ranging from less than a dozen in some of the western to more than two thousand in some of the eastern counties.

Bordering on Virginia, and occurring at various intervals from the sea-coast to

the mountains, there were considerable areas then considered too poor for profitable cultivation. A meagre, whitish soil, thirsty and unrecuperative, afforded grudging sustenance to a puny, grotesque growth of blackjack and chincapin, even the renovating pine — the badge of the State — being in many places a rarity. They were dreary, poverty-stricken regions, inhabited almost exclusively by poor non-slave-holding whites, and selling up to the war often as low as one dollar an acre. The slave-holders and more substantial immigrants settled farther inward, along the streams, or on the stiffer lands, then alone regarded fit for producing tobacco. However, I will add that the development of the bright tobacco industry — for which this soil, aided by commercial fertilizers, is wonderfully adapted — has very recently made this the most prosperous part of the State.

To this section the free negroes had been straggling over from Virginia from a very early period. And although their immigration into the State was prohibited, under heavy penalty, by the acts of 1795, — supplemented by still more stringent ones, none of which were ever repealed, — they continued to come, almost up to the war of secession. In some cases their coming was doubtless surreptitious, but usually, by selecting a quiet period, and settling in a favorable neighborhood, they ran little or no risk of having the law enforced against them. They rarely, at any rate towards the last, penetrated very deep into the State: partly because they feared opposition; partly because they attached a vague idea of safety to the border; mainly because there lands were cheap, and the poor white population not averse to their settlement. For the land-owners, being in need of labor, found it much cheaper to employ them than to hire slaves. It was only in such neighborhoods that the free negro could ever hope to become a freeholder. The lands farther inward were

not only more valuable, but also in the hands of large owners, who rarely sold unless constrained by debt, or desirous of moving West. Land at the South was, in a stronger sense than elsewhere, considered the final investment of money. Least of all would the nervous slave-owner have been disposed to sell to this half-feared, half-despised class. But the poor whites of the border, with no slaves to be corrupted, owned more or less poor land, for which they were glad to find purchasers, tenants, or laborers. Yet notwithstanding the merely nominal price of land, a large majority of these immigrants always remained too poor to become freeholders, squatting instead on barren, worn-out corners, or along rocky, untillable ridges; the convenience of having this docile, uncomplaining help within call being deemed a fair compensation for the equally superfluous wood and water they consumed. In some instances they were tenants at will by a tenure not unlike the milder types of feudalism.

A very few prospered, bought larger and better farms, and even owned slaves, — one as many as thirty, — which they held up to general emancipation. But generally, when they bought land at all, the purchase was ludicrously small, and, in the country phrase, “so po’ it could n’t sprout er pea dout grunt’n.” On these infinitesimal bits they built flimsy log huts, travesties in every respect of the rude dwellings of the earliest white settlers. The timber growth being often too scant to afford fence rails, their little patches of phantom corn mixed with pea-vines — or, rather, stubs, their little quota of hulls akimbo on top — were encircled by brush fences, which even by dint of annual renewals were scarcely to be regarded by a beast of average hunger and enterprise.

The subsidence of the alarm of 1802 was followed by nearly thirty years of comparative quiet. So far these alarms had, with scarcely an exception, ended

in smoke, leaving little permanent impress on the popular mind. The unfathomable race prejudice of later years had not yet developed into a mania. Negrophobia was then a hardly known malady. The resentment against the antislavery spirit of the North had not yet been poured out on the head of the negro. The attitude of the races towards each other was widely different from what it afterwards became. But about 1830, a growing mistrust on the part of the whites manifested itself. Abolitionism, hitherto the hobby of visionaries and isolated philanthropists, had now grown to be the watchword of a militant, uncompromising party. Its subtle leaven permeated the whole country, encouraging the slave, exasperating the master. It would be curious to know what were the real grounds of these panics. But in all history there are fewer mysteries more insolvable. Secretiveness is the chief characteristic of the negro, and on this subject, above all others, he is immovably silent. It seems most probable that there was general disquiet among the slaves at these periods, but no far-reaching conspiracy. That the scare was out of all proportion to the danger is not to be doubted. The mystery and uncertainty that shrouded the whole matter left the imagination full play. Still, all the white survivors of that time that I have questioned agree in maintaining that a great change came over the negroes. They are said to have suddenly become less joyous, more reticent and thoughtful. Large meetings of a quasi-religious character were held in secret. Prayer meetings found their scores swell into hundreds. By incredible journeys between sun and sun representatives from many counties frequently attended the same meeting. Then the memorable sun spots of 1831 undoubtedly wrought on the superstition of both races. Apprehension took hold of the whites; it grew into alarm, and burst into panic when Nat Turner

and his followers began their midnight butcheries just over the Virginia border.

In general it might be said that the fears of the people spoke in framing the negro laws, their hearts in executing them. But on occasions like this, it was the reverse. All the dead laws were hunted up, put into execution, and exceeded. Patrolling, the greatest of all hardships to the sociable, restless negro, not hitherto common in this State, now became a system, strict and unsparring.

This highly wrought state of the public mind naturally found expression in legislation. Minor acts of this nature were passed in 1830, and in the following year legislation began in earnest. From then till 1837 the statute book abounds in stringent laws against slaves and free negroes.

Whenever servile insurrection arose or was apprehended, the free negro seems to have fallen under even greater suspicion than the slave. He was half believed to value his freedom solely as a means to sow discontent among the slaves. The fact that he was out of all sympathy with them, that really a strong dislike existed between the two, did not exonerate him. It was doubtless regarded as but another proof of his astute dissimulation. It was made unlawful to free any slave under fifty years of age, and then it could be effected only as a reward for meritorious services. Such persons were allowed to remain in the State on giving bond in five hundred dollars for their "good behavior." A fine of five hundred dollars was imposed for bringing a free negro into the State, and he must leave in twenty days or be sold, for ten years. If a native free negro left the State for ninety days, he could never return.

The state convention called in 1835, to amend the constitution, among other important changes, such as the disfranchisement of the boroughs and the removal of the gubernatorial election from the legislature to the people, also dis-

franchised the free negroes. Hitherto there had existed in this State the strange anomaly of a class incompetent to testify in court, and otherwise almost as destitute of rights as brutes, exercising a function everywhere deemed the first of privileges, and which the vast mass of freemen in the most enlightened countries of the world are yet striving to attain. But even prior to their disfranchisement the free negroes were too timid and lethargic ever to possess even the modicum of political influence to which their numbers would seem to have entitled them. In a few of the northern counties only do they ever seem to have become an object to demagogues. There is still a tradition among them in Granville County that they lost the franchise on account of their persistent support of the notorious Potter. Potter, though a man of parts and a natural orator, was a consummate demagogue and a violent, unscrupulous man, whose new departure in iniquity evoked special legislation. Toward the last, the free negroes falling more and more into disrepute, their support carried such a stigma with it as to be an element of weakness rather than of strength to a candidate. More than one candidate of those days, twitted by his opponent on the stump about this element of his constituency, retorted by declaring his willingness to throw out every free-negro ballot, if his assailant would do likewise.

After this period, the life of the free negro grew unspeakably harder. Not so much that the laws were harsher, but because the attitude of the whites became and continued more hostile. Neither the harshness nor the leniency of the laws was of great moment to him, who could in no wise put them in operation even for his own protection. His lot added the disability of the slave to the responsibility of the freeman. Dependent on his own industry and enterprise, as the slave was not, he found the field of his labor contracted, till subsis-

tence became a formidable problem indeed. Except among the non-slave-holding farmers, who were often too poor to pay him sufficient hire to sustain life, he could find little employment that did not bring him in contact with the slave, while the main end of public policy was to keep them as far apart as possible. Intermarriage and social intercourse were of course strictly forbidden by law. With him, all depended on the temper of the whites among whom he lived. If they were kind and well disposed, he had little to complain of. But if they were cruel or alarmist, his condition was pitiable beyond words. Then all his movements were closely watched, and his actions ingeniously tortured to sinister ends. If, in quest of employment, he ventured out of his immediate neighborhood and neglected to take his free papers, he got into serious trouble. Even carrying them in his pocket, if his actions aroused suspicion and his explanation was not at once prompt, lucid, and consistent, he also got into trouble. Dumb as a witness against the dominant race, he not infrequently became the object of the spite of malicious white men, or the wanton cruelty of heartless, unthinking striplings.

It is not to be wondered that the free negroes, unelastic and prone to unthrift, underwent still further deterioration. Cowed, perplexed, and dispirited, they huddled together on any scant, sterile bit of land that they were fortunate enough to be possessed of, erected clusters of their frail little huts, and like oppressed, hopeless classes the world over sunk into profound listlessness and sloth. The women grew unchaste, the men dishonest, until in many minds the term "free negro" became a synonym for all that was worthless and despicable. Their settlements were commonly contiguous to some town; the counties in which were located Raleigh, Wilmington, New Berne, and Fayetteville containing nearly a fourth of all the free

negroes in the State, in which the apter males became barbers, fiddlers, or Jacks-of-all-trades. Some followed ditching, well-digging, and such work as was considered too perilous or too unhealthy to risk slaves in its performance. I never knew a neighborhood without a free-negro shoemaker. In fact, they were largely, perforce, a class of piddlers; and like piddlers everywhere more indispensable than any other element of the community. The majority kept soul and body together with the product of their sterile little patches, eked out with a petty traffic in the rude articles of their own make, such as chairs, splint baskets, horse-collars and door-mats made from shucks and bark, "dug" troughs, bread-trays, etc. Many derived almost their whole living from the sale of ginger cakes, and watermelons, wild nuts, and fruits when in season, at the neighboring towns, or on Saturdays and "big" days at the cross-road stores and country post-offices.

In some of the county seats, during court week, an aged specimen of this latter type is still occasionally to be seen selling ginger cakes. Generally tall, meagre, stooping, slouching, for all the world the color of his own wares, he lounges half listlessly, half dejectedly, on the shafts of the little steer-cart bearing his antiquated confections, silently awaiting the customers that never seem to come nowadays. He and his cakes are almost the sole survivors of ante-bellum days. But in all his silent musings it seems not to have occurred to him that he is an anachronism. That he is still catering to the obsolete gastronomy of a long-gone generation, and that his goodies are caviare to their grandchildren, has never entered his mind. At least, if it has, he is too staunch a quietist or pessimist, no one knows which, to care much. He has seen the primitive wooden court-house supplanted by a pretentious brick one; the once boundless court-house green contracted and con-

tracted, till the pitiless march of brick and mortar has left him no stopping place save an unsafe and ignoble one in the gutter. He has seen man and nature change, but it has never suggested new methods, any more than the fact that people quit eating home-made ginger cakes a generation ago has suggested the advisability of discontinuing their manufacture. Like the persistent sibyl of old, his serene confidence in his wares is not a jot abated because they are ignored of men and have diminished in quantity. And there he will be every court week, more punctual than judge or jury, till some hard-hearted board of town commissioners pronounce him a nuisance, when he will uncomplainingly take a remoter stand, unless perchance before then death the gleaner should follow in the swath of death the reaper.

To one acquainted with the stringent laws against the manumission of slaves and against the immigration of free negroes, and not with the impunity with which those laws were disregarded, the number of free negroes in the State might well be a matter of wonder. From the infancy of the colony in the latter part of the seventeenth century, the laws placed every bar in the way of manumission short of total and absolute prohibition. First, only the "good and orderly" slaves could be set free for "honest and faithful" service. Later on, when it became the custom to construe these qualifications too liberally, the power of determining these was removed from the master to the county court, which was essentially the same as the method in the other Southern States. Still later, a slave must be over fifty years of age before he could be set free at all. Excepting for a very short period, the latter class of freedmen were the only ones permitted to remain in the State, although under bond for their behavior. For even the law of 1795, which permitted free negroes to enter and reside within the State on giving a

bond of £200, tantamount to prohibition, was soon repealed. True, occasionally the legislature did, by special enactment, sanction the manumission of slaves, and also suspend the banishing clause. But the number manumitted in this way must have been comparatively small.

But as the laws were often exceeded or disregarded to the negro's harm, so also were they sometimes exceeded or disregarded in his favor. Many industrious, thrifty slaves, especially mechanics, not only hired themselves in the face of a law forbidding it, but with money thus earned bought their own freedom, and sometimes that of their families, and remained in the State unmolested. Of course the whole transaction was informal and illegal, and in the eyes of the law they were the property of their former master. But they were practically free men, and I never heard of a case in which a master proved treacherous. Nor would the community have countenanced such an act.

I knew of a very touching instance in which a free negro became the purchaser, though not the owner, of his family. He was a blacksmith, and had married a slave woman, by whom he had several children. His shop was on her master's farm, where he was liked and kindly treated. But finally the master got involved in debt, and all of his slaves, among them the blacksmith's family, were seized by the creditors and sold to a speculator, who resold them in Mississippi. The husband, who was then forehanded, went desperately to work, and in a few years scraped together sufficient money, placed it in their first owner's hand, and got him to repurchase and bring back from the terrible South the loved ones; content that they should remain slaves—for the temper of the neighborhood was hostile to manumission—so that he need not be separated from them.

Several large slave-holders in the eastern part of the State not only set their

slaves free by will, with legislative sanction, but also gave them an outfit and paid their passage to Liberia. But bills of manumission were not always sure of passage. All depended on the mood of the legislature. A noted politician, since the war conspicuous for his eccentricities as well as for his services to the State, is said to have opposed one of these bills, by which a very old man sought power to free his slaves at his death, in the following speech: "Mr. Speaker, this old man is a slave-holder, the son of a slave-holder, the grandson of a slave-holder. He inherited slaves without compunction, and has held and enjoyed them far beyond the span of most human lives without a qualm. He never seems to have realized the sinfulness of slavery as long as it was useful to himself. Now that he totters on the brink of the grave he would fain propitiate an offended God by an offering that costs him nothing. Like a mediæval reprobate bequeathing his all to the church, he would buy heaven, but his heir must pay for it. I can see no justice in that. He has waited too late. And now, sir, if that is his only chance of heaven, and my vote avails anything, I shall keep him out. I vote nay." I think the bill was lost.

In the excitement preceding the war, as well as in the disorder attending it, these mud-sills of society, of course, had the hardest lot of all. They fared badly, not because they were the objects of any special ill-will, — all fears of servile trouble being eclipsed and forgotten in the pressing exigencies of the hour, — but simply because they were unprotected in a period of general confusion and irresponsibility. Some few were seized and sold as slaves, their feeble protest being drowned in the tumult. All males within the drafting age of from eighteen to forty-five were compelled to serve the Confederacy as laborers on the fortifications, unless already acting as servants for officers in the field. Most of

the free negroes served in the latter capacity, but few officers being willing to risk their slaves so near the Federal lines. As laborers on the fortifications they received the same pay as white privates, while those that served the officers were still better paid by the individuals employing them. About the beginning of the war the question was mooted of compelling all free negroes to choose masters and become slaves, or be forthwith expelled the State; but it was soon lost sight of in the stress of affairs, if indeed it was ever seriously entertained.

At the close of the war the appellations "Old Issue" and "New Issue," to distinguish the free from the freed negroes, were invented by the latter. The blacks are quick at appropriating new words, and sometimes very original in applying them; and this instance came about as follows: Early in 1864, when Confederate money had greatly depreciated in value, it was rumored that the government was about to make a new issue of notes, whose purchasing value would be fixed by law, and that they would bring back the good old time prices. While those competent to judge must have known better, popular expectation was on tiptoe. Wonders were fondly hoped for from this magic "New Issue." It came. Almost the only effect was at once to still farther depreciate the "Old Issue," while prices went steadily upward. The war ended while these terms were still fresh in the popular mind, and the only result of this great financial scheme was to add two words — "Ol' Isshy" and "New Isshy" — to the negro's scant vocabulary. The terms were expressive and appropriate, and no one now thinks of using any other.

The war ended, a radically new era began. Life and thought, with a sharp wrench, assumed new lines. The social kaleidoscope, shaken by the rude hand of war, shivered, and was recast into

strangely new forms. The slave, suddenly metamorphosed into a free man, struck out for himself with more or less energy and judgment, but nevertheless under a new impulse. His quondam master, though stunned for a while, finally dropped into a new rut, and began life anew. But the effect on this neutral class was comparatively slight. His sloth was too profound, his isolation too complete, he was too far out of sympathy with his surroundings, to feel with effect the impulse of the new order of things. He saw the war end, and oppression and disability cease, with his inherent listlessness. Almost wholly destitute of the vigor and elasticity of the freedman and of the industrious habits which the latter had perforce acquired as a slave, the "Ol' Isshy" remains to-day largely an alien to the strivings and aspirations of his contemporaries. Some, well to do at the end of the war, failing to catch the new drift, have become impoverished. The line of demarkation between the Old and New "Isshy" is not only still plainly visible, but bids fair long to continue so. Associating but little with each other, intermarriage is not common. A free negro who marries a freed one almost invariably loses caste, and is disowned by his people. The freedmen make no secret of their dislike and contempt for the other class, which is reciprocated by feelings more covert, but perhaps still deeper. In their habits, manner, and dress the free negroes still resemble, as they always did, the poorest class of whites much closer than they do the freedmen.

Of course the cause of the comparative retrogradation of this class is to be found in the innate indolence and shiftlessness of the race, superinduced by their exceptionally unfavorable conditions of life under the old *régime*, the influence of which will doubtless not be entirely spent for many generations. Both instinct and environment have

been against them. But there are two factors that have worked together to form or intensify the former that I have not yet seen duly noticed. The first of these lies in the fact that they are almost wholly a hybrid race, and therefore deficient in stamina, as hybrid races are in general and the mulatto in particular. According to the census of 1860, fifty-five per cent. of all the free-negro population consisted of mulattoes, a proportion eight times greater than existed among the slaves. Of course the proportion of those with blood more or less mixed was very much larger. Indeed, of all the hundreds of free negroes that I have known from childhood, I cannot now recall a dozen black or very dark ones. Hardly a neighborhood was free from low white women who married or cohabited with free negroes. Well can I recollect the many times when, with the inconsiderate curiosity of a child, I hurriedly climbed the front gate-post to get a good look at a shriveled old white woman trudging down the lane, who, when young, I was told, had had her free-negro lover-bleed, and drank some of his blood, so that she might swear she had negro blood in her, and thus marry him without penalty. Since I became a man I have heard it corroborated by those who knew, and I still occasionally see the children of this tragic marriage, now grown old men.

The other factor in their decadence — or perhaps more correctly, another cause of their torpor and inelasticity — is the considerable infusion of Indian blood generally diffused by exclusive intermarriage in their own class, and which has unduly asserted itself owing to their irregular mode of life for many generations. From the nature of the case, the extent of this infusion is of course hard to approximate. If the account of the free negro himself is to be received, it is large, though his anxiety to disown all negro affinity causes one to receive his

statement with caution and allowance. But, tradition aside, many, if not the larger part, of the free negroes whose freedom dates back further than this century show traits of mind and body that are unmistakably Indian. In many instances, long, coarse, straight black hair and high cheek-bones are joined with complexions whose duskiness disclaims white blood and with features clearly un-African. True, these extreme types are the exception; but the majority shade up to it more or less closely. These traits are more noticeable among women, forming no exception to the usual accentuation of racial characteristics in the female. The mental qualities of unrecuperativeness and transcendent indolence of a drowsy, listless type, coupled with lurking vindictiveness, all point the same way.

My neighborhood contains an "Ol' Isshy" town, a petrified remnant of the past, hardly an exaggeration of the general type, in which the above race marks are to be seen in their full development. It stands about five miles from the railroad station, and consists of some half a dozen families, scantily provided with fathers, crowded into as many little huts scattered here and there on a "slipe" of very poor, rocky ridge. Here they have vegetated for several generations since their ancestors immigrated from Virginia, early in the century. They are intensely clannish and loyal to each other, timid and suspicious of the outside world, of which they are incredibly ignorant. Many of the women have grown old without ever seeing the cars or having been in a town, although almost within sight of both. They still cherish boundless respect for the class that are to them, and to them

alone, "rich folks," coupled with an abiding dislike of the "New Isshy," especially if he is black. A marriage, even a *liaison*, with one would be instantly fatal to the reputation of any female among them, though, excepting the African, the children of many, in point of variety of color at least, might serve to illustrate the five races of mankind. After their own immediate class, they associate almost wholly with the poorest whites, though not quite as equals.

Till the reduction of the revenue tax, a few years ago, rendered "blockading" no longer profitable, the whole settlement was engaged, in connection with several white men, nearly as poor as themselves, in a petty traffic in illicit tobacco. The tobacco, after being stemmed and prepared in the lofts of their little huts and pressed in the woods, was smuggled off at night for sale in the eastern part of the State. The quality of the product was necessarily of the sorriest, and the annual profit must have been paltry in the extreme. But it fended the wolf after a fashion; the labor required was trifling and intermittent, while the spice of danger was doubtless grateful as giving some zest to the monotonous languor of their lives. For years they did literally nothing else, save perhaps a still pettier traffic in unlicensed whiskey, which I suspect they have not yet abandoned. Cold, hunger, even fatigue, they seem indifferent to, but labor when it assumes the form of a task appalls them. Even the children, instead of proclaiming their wants with the unthinking clamor characteristic of childhood, pine and dwindle in silence, seeming to regard hunger as the normal condition of life.

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